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## ABSTRACT

The strategy of diagnostic supervision, and the diagnostic conference, are outlined in this paper. Diagnostic supervision involves the supervisor and teachers in a process of recognizing needs, stating problems, and agreeing on objectives for the teachers' instructional improvement. The diagnostic conference, one tool used within the process, helps the supervisor diagnose the needs, interests, and abilities of teachers in relation to the needs of the school district. The Diagnostic Conference Planning Questionnaire (DCPQ) is a planning instrument using two lists--one concerning the role expectations for teachers, the other concerning job-related psychological needs of teachers. The teachers select the items of interest to them; the supervisor then meets with each teacher to discuss these selections. In the diagnostic conference the teacher is invited to share leadership so that it is jointly conducted. During the conference the needs of the teacher are identified, confirmed, and restated as problems to be solved. Objectives are agreed upon for problem solution and the strategies for reaching the objectives are selected and designed. This process is an ongoing dialogue between supervisor and teacher that is maintained for more than one conference period. The paper includes five recommendations for managing the process, a copy of the DCPQ, and a short reference list. (MD)

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## DIAGNOSTIC CONFERENCING IN SUPERVISION

by

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### INTRODUCTION

The quality of information available to an instructional supervisor regarding his or her teachers is important. Actually, it is possible to argue that for the process of instructional supervision to be effective, the supervisor must have an understanding of the teachers' job-related needs, interests, and abilities. Additionally, the effectiveness of instructional supervision may also be related to how well the supervisor uses this diagnostic information to respond to the needs of the school district for providing quality educational services to children. What is described below is a supervisory strategy and tool for helping instructional supervisors to gather diagnostic information about teachers' professional needs, interests, and abilities in direct relation to the school district's needs for providing educational services. The strategy is called Diagnostic Supervision. The tool is called the Diagnostic Conference.

### DIAGNOSTIC SUPERVISION

Diagnostic Supervision (Seager, 1979) is defined as a process of supervision that

responds to individual needs, interests, and abilities

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in the context of institutional and community goals  
and priorities for educational services. (p. 4)

It is supervision which involves the supervisor and teachers in a process of recognizing needs, stating problems and agreeing on objectives to help the teacher improve instruction and grow professionally. It is a process of supervision that recognizes the impact of teacher attitudes on the problems of improving instruction and growing professionally and one which recognizes that teachers are at different developmental levels in relation to change objectives. The conceptual structure of this supervisory strategy is represented in Figure 1.

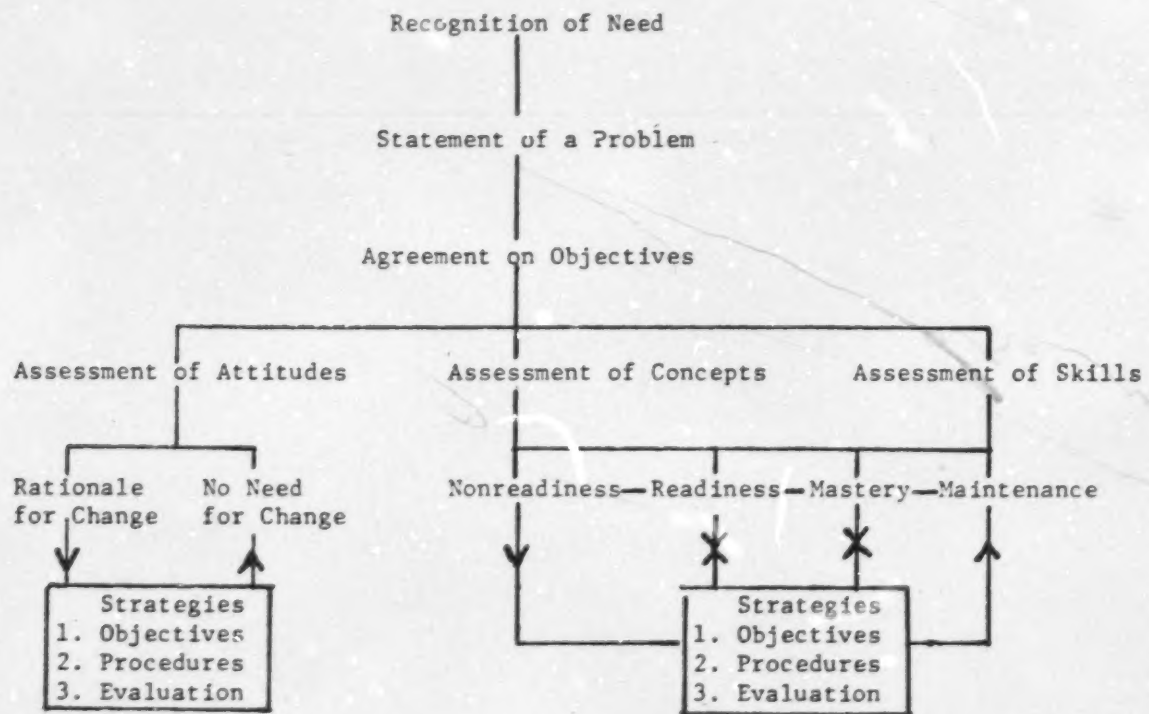
\_\_\_\_\_ Insert Figure 1 \_\_\_\_\_

#### THE DIAGNOSTIC CONFERENCE

The Diagnostic Conference was designed as one tool for use within the process of Diagnostic Supervision. It was originally designed and used (Duffy, 1979) with principals and teachers from the Chicago, Illinois Area and the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Area. The basic purpose of the Diagnostic Conference is to help the supervisor diagnose the needs, interests, and abilities of teachers in relation to the needs of the school district (as reflected in role expectations held for teachers).

The conference design was derived from the bodies of knowledge on organization change and development, the psychology of human needs, and instructional supervision. From the field of organization change and development, principles of shared decision-making were built into the design. This body of knowledge also indicated the importance of supervisors not only attending to the role expectations held for people

Figure 1: A Diagnostic Paradigm for Supervision or Teaching



(Seager, 1979, with permission)

in organizations but also to their job-related psychological needs (e.g., see Getzels and Guba, 1957). From the body of knowledge on the psychology of human needs, specific categories of human psychological needs were identified (Maslow, 1954). From the field of instructional supervision, common role expectations for teachers were extracted.

The Diagnostic Conference Planning Questionnaire (DCPQ). The Diagnostic Conference Planning Questionnaire (DCPQ) is a planning instrument which contains two lists: a list of role expectations that are commonly held for teachers and a list of job-related psychological needs of teachers (see Figure 2). The supervisor gives this questionnaire

— INSERT FIGURE 2 —

to the teacher(or teachers) and asks him or her to select one item from each list. The teacher is encouraged to select the items which are of interest to him or her. The teacher may select items which represent personal strengths or those which are of concern. It is important to state clearly that the Diagnostic Conference does not have to focus on the deficits of the teacher--it can focus on strengths.

Given the selected role expectation and job-related personal need, the supervisor plans for a 20 to 30 minute conference with the teacher to discuss these selections. The supervisor and the teacher should reach an agreement prior to the conference about how much time should be devoted to each of the teacher's selections. If time is not available to discuss adequately both of the teacher's selections in one conference, then there should be a mutual agreement to meet again to continue the discussion of the teacher's needs and interests. Diagnostic conferencing should be conceived of as a process rather than a singular event, thereby endorsing the principle of an "on-going professional dialogue."

Figure 2: The Diagnostic Conference Planning Questionnaire (DCPQ)

SUPERVISOR \_\_\_\_\_ TEACHER \_\_\_\_\_  
 SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

To the teacher:

Please select one area of role expectations and one area of job-related personal needs that you would like to focus on in a Diagnostic Conference with your supervisor or principal. The supervisor will use your selections to plan for the conference.

Role Expectations

- \_\_\_ TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS
- \_\_\_ CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
- \_\_\_ INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS
- \_\_\_ PLANNING FOR INSTRUCTION
- \_\_\_ REPORTING TO ADMINISTRATORS
- \_\_\_ CONFERENCING WITH PARENTS
- \_\_\_ NON-TEACHING DUTIES
- \_\_\_ EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES
- \_\_\_ PARTICIPATION IN STAFF MEETINGS
- \_\_\_ EVALUATION OF STUDENT LEARNING
- \_\_\_ OTHER (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Job-Related Personal Needs

- \_\_\_ AUTONOMY (The need to work relatively independent of close supervision)
- \_\_\_ AFFILIATION (The need to belong to a group or to associate with others)
- \_\_\_ ACHIEVEMENT (The need to demonstrate mastery of selected concepts and skills)
- \_\_\_ APPROVAL (The need to be recognized for one's achievements)
- \_\_\_ ACCEPTANCE (The need for respect from superiors, peers, students, and others)
- \_\_\_ KNOWLEDGE (The need to be informed about matters of importance on a timely basis)
- \_\_\_ INVOLVEMENT (The need to be involved in decisions that have a personal impact).
- \_\_\_ EFFICACY (The need to see that one's work is making a difference)
- \_\_\_ OTHER (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

The Diagnostic Conference. After receiving the DCPQ from the teacher, the supervisor plans to conduct a Diagnostic Conference with that teacher. The supervisor encourages the teacher to share leadership in this conference so that they can jointly recognize needs, state problems and agree on objectives related to the teacher's selections on the DCPQ.

During the Diagnostic Conference the supervisor and the teacher explore the teacher's rationale for his/her selections on the DCPQ. Through this mutual exploration of the teacher's rationale, needs of the teacher are inferred by the supervisor. These inferred needs are then shared with the teacher so that these may be confirmed or disconfirmed. The inferred needs with which the teacher agrees should then be stated as problems to be solved. Given a particular problem, objectives are agreed upon for solving the problem. Strategies for moving toward the objectives are selected or designed.

It is important to note here that it will be unusual for a supervisor and a teacher to move through the diagnostic supervisory paradigm to the point of selecting strategies in only one Diagnostic Conference. Thus, it is important to conceive of the above process as "Diagnostic Conferencing," whereby a professional dialogue is established with the first Diagnostic Conference and maintained through an on-going dialectic between the supervisor and teacher with goals of improving instruction and promoting the professional growth of the teacher.

Managing the Process. First, it must be jointly recognized by the supervisor and the teacher that the Diagnostic Conference is not meant to replace other kinds of supervisory conferences; e.g., the conference which occurs prior to and after a classroom observation. It

is a special supervisory tool for diagnosing the needs, interests, and abilities of teachers in relation to the needs of the school district.

Second, it may not be possible to complete an adequate diagnosis of the teacher's needs, interests, and abilities within the timeline of one diagnostic conference. Thus, the supervisor and teacher should recognize that diagnostic conferencing is an on-going process rather than a singular event. Additionally, both participants should not force closure on important issues just to meet the 20 to 30 minute "deadline" for the conference.

Third, supervisors should anticipate that some teachers will resist sharing information about their personal needs. This resistance is probably related to the level of trust that exists between the supervisor and the teacher. It is okay for a teacher to resist sharing this information. The supervisor should not force the issue; rather (s)he should recognize this resistance as a diagnostic clue regarding the relationship that (s)he has with that teacher. Strategies should then be selected by the supervisor and teacher to develop further the supervisory relationship that exists between them.

Fourth, the supervisor needs to recognize that not all of the teacher's concerns can be responded to within the context of supervision. For example, there are certain role expectations held for teachers that are non-negotiable within a school district--they cannot be changed because these expectations respond to vital organizational needs for providing quality education to children. Additionally, there are some job-related personal needs that the supervisor may not be able to respond to within the process of supervision. However, the above potential constraints should not prevent the supervisor and teacher from

talking about the needs and interests of the teacher. The supervisor must try to develop a dialogue with the teacher about these issues while at the same time keeping his/her response in balance with the needs of the school district for providing educational services.

Fifth, it is crucial to the effectiveness of Diagnostic Supervision and the Diagnostic Conferencing process that the objectives that are agreed upon for responding to the needs, interests, and abilities of the teachers are acted upon as soon as possible after the conclusion of the conference. Taking action communicates clearly and forcefully to the teacher that his/her opinions are valued and that his/her objectives are valid and meaningful. Reaching agreement on objectives for improving instruction or for growing professionally without action toward those objectives is a waste of everyone's precious time.

Sixth, in stating problems and in selecting objectives for helping the teacher to improve instruction or to grow professionally, it is important to begin with easy problems and simple objectives. The purpose of this strategy is to assure early success in the problem-solving process. Early success provides the foundation for addressing more difficult problems in the future.

#### CONCLUSION

Diagnostic Supervision and Diagnostic Conferencing can be effective in helping supervisors and teachers to diagnose the needs, interests, and abilities of the teacher in relation to the school's priorities for providing educational services to children. Whether or not the diagnostic information that is collected is translated into action for improving instruction or for the professional growth of the teacher is a problem

that must be solved by the supervisor and teacher working together as colleagues--Diagnostic Supervision and Diagnostic Conferencing alone cannot solve this problem. By applying the principles of Diagnostic Supervision and by using such supervisory tools as the Diagnostic Conference, both the supervisor and teacher may make significant strides toward increasing their professional effectiveness--the supervisor in the area of instructional supervision, the teacher in the area of teaching, and both of them in the area human relations.

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